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AN  
ESSAY  
UPON  
The Nature of  
A  
CHURCH,  
AND  
The Extent  
OF  
*Ecclesiastical Authority.*

By a Lay-man of the Church of  
ENGLAND.

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A N  
**ESSAY**  
 UPON THE  
**Nature of a Church,**  
 And the EXTENT of  
*Ecclesiastical Authority.*

**T**HE Abuse of *Ecclesiastical Authority* has done such Infinite Mischief in the World, and the Thing it self appears to be so little understood, even in an Age of greater Light, Learning and good Sense, perhaps than any that has gone before it, that I flatter my self, it will not be thought, by the Fair and Impartial Enquirers after Truth, useless or unseasonable to examine into the Nature and Extent of that *Authority* Christ has left in the *Church* for the due Government thereof, in order to promote the Great End of his coming into the World, *The Salvation of Souls.*

That the Apostles did, wherever they made a sufficient Number of Converts, form them into Societies for the Worship of God, appoint Pastors and Teachers for the Instruction and Edification of the People in the true Knowledge of the Gospel, and that these Societies were called *Ἐκκλησίαι*, which we translate *Churches*, is I think allowed on all Hands. By the Word *Ἐκκλησία*, then in the Language of the New Testament, is meant *A Society formed purely and solely for the Worship of God Almighty, the promoting of Christian Knowledge, with the Advancement of true Piety and Virtue, and all in order to the Salvation of Men's Souls.*

From hence it follows by a direct and immediate Consequence, That no Societies form'd upon any other Views, or with any other Designs than those just mentioned, can in the True Genuine and Scripture Notion of the Word be called *Churches*.

It will be wholly impertinent to object against my Notion of a *Church*, that I do not include in it the Form of Government of Divine Appointment, which is Necessary and Essential to the Being of a *Church*, and therefore not to be left out of the Definition of it: For whether my Account of a *Church* be allow'd for an accurate and exact Definition or no, is of no Consequence to the Matter in hand; it is sufficient for my Purpose, that all must allow it at least for a Part of such a Definition; and that no Society of Christians can be called a *Church* in the *Original, Proper and Scripture Notion* of the Word, but what is constituted solely and wholly for the Ends above specified.

From



From hence again it follows *Demonstratively*, That a *Church* is a *Voluntary Society*, into which no Man is to be forced, or obliged to continue in it by Force, contrary to the Dictates of his own *Conscience*; since this would be directly contrary to the sole End and Design of the Society, which being the Worship of God, with the Advancement of Christian Knowledge, Piety and Virtue, in order to Salvation; to force any Man to join in that Worship, whilst he looks upon himself as obliged in *Conscience* to the contrary, would be the most flagrant Inconsistency with that End imaginable; since it would be obliging him to affront his Maker in the most outrageous manner possible: which sure cannot be a proper way of Worship, or a Means of Salvation, but on the contrary a certain Means of Damnation, and therefore utterly inconsistent with the sole End and Design of the Society.

From hence again it follows directly and demonstratively, That the *Tribe of Hereticks and Schismatics who adhere to the Pope of Rome*, and commonly go by the Name of the *Church of Rome*, are in Reality, and in strict and proper speaking no *Church* at all: for besides that Men are forced into the Communion of it, and kept there by Force; the distinguishing Doctrines of that *pretended Church* are such an abominable Mass of Impiety, Absurdity and Nonsense, as the first Contrivers and Broachers, together with the main Sticklers for, and Supporters of, can not be supposed to have believed themselves. It is very hard for any reasonable Man that knows what *Popery* is to think otherwise, than that it was Originally contrived, has been, and

is at this Day, supported wittingly and knowingly in direct Opposition to all the Ends of the Gospel, and that by the most inhuman Cruelties that the Will of Man, help'd and assisted by the Cunning and Contrivance of the Devil, could invent: So that the Name *Church* may with as much Propriety be extended to a *Den of Thieves*, or a *Nest of Pirates*, since both the one and the other are engaged in Designs equally contrary to those of Heaven or the Laws of the Gospel, only with this woful Disadvantage to the *pretended Church of Rome*, that she fathers her Villanies upon God Almighty himself, and is guilty of carrying on the most hellish Designs, under the Pretence of his Authority, and the Colour of Religion, and therefore must appear more odious and abominable in the Eyes of God, than Robbers and Pirates, or the greatest Villains upon Earth besides.

I observe further that what I have said in the Beginning of the foregoing Paragraph, is exactly conformable to the Doctrine of the *Church of England*, which in her *Articles* says, That the *visible Church of Christ is a Congregation of Faithful Men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly administred according to Christ's Ordinance in all things that of Necessity appertain to the same.* Now he that owns this for a true Definition, and at the same time seriously maintains the *pretended Church of Rome* to be a true Church, may shuffle and double as much as he pleases, but this is certain that he is either actually a *Papist* or a *Fool*.

It is really amazing to find any amongst *Protestants*, especially such as lay great Stress upon the



the *primitive Fathers*, and upon other Occasions fall in with their Notions of *Heresy* and *Schism* entirely; I say, it's amazing to find any such to own the *pretended Church of Rome* to be a *true Church*, for according to the Notions that universally prevail'd amongst the *Primitive Fathers*, *Heresy* and *Schism* cut Men off from the *Catholick Church*, and to them it would have appear'd highly ridiculous so much as to have made a Question of it, Whether a Society of *Hereticks* and *Schismatics* could be a *true Church*. It is, I suppose, universally agreed amongst *Protestants*, that the *Papists* are both *Hereticks* and *Schismatics*; and, I add, the grossest and the most abominable Wretches of that kind that ever disgrac'd *Christianity*, or ever will. I think, I may defie any one, that is so far a Friend to the *Romanists* as to own them for a *true Church*, at the same time that he professes himself a *Protestant*, to produce any Definition of a *Church* applicable to them, that will not at the first sight appear highly ridiculous to maintain, that a Society form'd on purpose to promote the Worldly Interests of the Governors and Managers of it, by debauching Men's Minds with the grossest and most pernicious Errors, in flat Contradiction and Defiance to the most Necessary and Essential Doctrines of *Christianity*; I say to maintain such a Society to be a *true Church*, is an Absurdity almost equal to the grossest Absurdities of *Po-pery*. For what can be more Ridiculous than to call a Society a *true Church of Christ* that is so far from being design'd solely for the Worship of God, and the Edification of the People in the Knowledge and Practice of their Duty, that it

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is solely and wholly calculated to promote the Worldly Interests of the Priests, and that by a Suppression of that Worship, by the grossest and most senseless Idolatry that was ever practised by the most Barbarous *Heathens*, by keeping the People as much as possible in Ignorance, thereby to conceal their own Villany, and lastly by making void in Effect the whole Law of God, by their scandalous Doctrine of *Attrition* and *Confession*, with other Doctrines of the like Nature. How can they be said to propose to themselves the Worship of God that will not suffer the People to worship him at all, in the Publick Assemblies which yet they pretend are chiefly design'd for that Purpose? I say the People are not suffer'd to worship God at all there, because their Service is in an unknown Tongue, and therefore it is impossible for the People to join in it; and they can no more be said to worship God in such a way, than a Person may be said to worship him, that only makes his Appearance at *Church* without regarding so much as one Word of what is said there. For what is the Difference, as to this Case, betwixt not Understanding and not Regarding? or what Obligation can they lie under to Attention, who cannot understand any thing of what is said? How can the Propagation of Christian Knowledge be so much as pretended to be at all design'd by the pretended *Church of Rome*, where all possible Methods are used to keep the People in Ignorance and Errour? To all this let me add, That these Damnable Designs of theirs are carried on by the most barbarous and inhuman Cruelties that were ever known amongst the Sons of Men,

or



or rather such as infinitely out-do all the malicious Contrivance and Cruelty of the Blackest Tyrants that ever liv'd. In short, nothing less will satiate their Malice than the utter Ruine of all such Body and Soul as much as lies in their Power, who differ from them in the least Title. And must a Society Establish'd in direct Opposition to all the Ends and Designs of the Gospel, for the suppressing the Worship of God, the promoting of Idolatry, the banishing of true Christian Knowledge out of the World, and the giving all possible Encouragement to Vice and Prophaneness, that is any ways consistent with the least outward Shew or Appearance of Religion; I say, shall a Society Establish'd to carry on these *Hellish Designs*, by all the Methods of Cruelty that the Devil himself could furnish, be called a *true Church of Christ*? those that say so would do well to consider how far short this comes of Blasphemy.

Having thus proved *the pretended Church of Rome* to be really and truly *no Church*, but quite the Reverse, *An Antichristian Society, a perfect Synagogue of Satan, set up with a Design to carry on his Work in the World under a Shew and Pretence of Religion*; I take Notice in the next Place, That all such Societies of Christians as assume to themselves the Name of a *Church*, and practice notwithstanding *the Damnable Doctrine of Persecution*, by forcing People into their Communion, or keeping them in it by *Force*, are altogether unworthy of that Name. For a *Church* being a Society solely intended for the Worship of God, and the Edification of its Members in Christian Knowledge, Piety and Virtue: it is very plain,

whatever may be pretended to the contrary, that can not be the sole End of such Societies where Men are forced to act contrary to Conscience. For none were ever yet so absurd as to deny, that for a Man to act against even a Misinformed and Erroneous Conscience is a Sin, and therefore whoever oblige Men to act in such a Manner do wittingly, knowingly and designedly, force Men to sin, promote Impiety and the Damnation of Souls, and therefore how great a Concern soever they may pretend for the Salvation of Men, it is a Jest, all Farce and Hypocrisy of the coarsest kind, they have other Aims and Designs, and what they are, the World is by sad and woeful Experience sufficiently convinc'd, and therefore I need not say. 'Tis plain then, that such Societies founded for Ends not only quite different from, but utterly inconsistent with those of a *Church*, have no Right or Title to that Name.

It likewise follows from what has been above said, that where any Persons through innocent Mistake seperate from a *true Church of Christ*, and form themselves into a Society for this End and Design only to worship God, and Edify in the Knowledge and Practice of their Duty, they may notwithstanding such a Separation be a *true Church of Christ*.

Having thus discovered in general what Societies are not *Churches*, I shall in the next Place enquire what kind of Authority the Governours of a *Church* have, and how far it extends: and

1. They have a Right to prescribe Time and Place for Publick Worship, with such *Ceremonies, Modes or Circumstances* of it, as are necessary for the



the *due* and *decent* Performance thereof. For the Scripture having only given general Rules for this Purpose, *That all things be done Decently, and in Order, and to Edification*, the Particular Application of them must belong to those appointed to bear Rule in the Church, or else there could be no Publick Worship at all. For Instance, The Scripture having no where directed, whether the *Publick Worship* should be by a *Form* or otherwise, whether by a *Number of separate distinct independent little Prayers*, or by *one continued Address to God*, as is the usual Way of Addressing upon all other Occasions; those appointed to bear Rule in the Church must settle and determine those Points, as they shall, upon their best Consideration, and as they will answer for it at the Great Day, think most agreeable to the *Apostle's* Direction of having all things done *decently* and to *Edification*. And in this whole Matter they are oblig'd to proceed with the utmost Caution, so as to give no Occasion of Offence, if possible, to such as are truly Religious in their Lives and Conversations, and hold all the Necessary Articles of Faith contain'd in the *Apostle's Creed*. For the only End of the Society being the true Worship of God, with the promoting of Piety and Virtue; the Terms of Communion ought to be as Easy as is consistent with that End, and no needless Occasion of Offence given to any Parties or Sects of Christians, as they may be distinguished from one another by their different Perswasions in Matters of lesser Moment, and acknowledg'd on all Hands not to be *Fundamental*: For so far as this is done, the very End and Design of the

Society is contradicted, by causing needless Divisions and Contentions, with all the ill Consequences that follow from them: In short all possible Care should be taken that none be shut out of *Christ's Church* here on Earth, that he will admit into his Kingdom in Heaven.

2. As in the *Apostle's* Time an Order of Men were set apart to minister in Holy things, and to instruct the People in their Duty; and it appears highly Reasonable and Necessary, as well from the Practice of the *Apostles*, as the Nature of the Thing it self, that an Order of Men should be set apart for that Purpose. The Rulers of the *Church* become hereby invested with a further Power of Ordaining and Appointing proper Persons, Men of good Lives and Conversations and Learning, capable of instructing the People by their Doctrine, as well as encouraging them by their Example to Piety and Virtue to officiate in the Publick Assemblies, by Praying, Preaching, and Administring the Sacraments; the particular Way and Manner of doing which being no where laid down in Scripture, it belongs to the *Governours of the Church* to regulate the Matter, as may be most conducive to the Design of the Institution, the due and orderly Performance of Divine Worship, and the Edification of the People. The *Governours of the Church* must likewise have a Power of inspecting into the Lives and Behaviour of the Persons so appointed, to see that they use all due Diligence in the Discharge of their Duty, and live up to the *Character* the *Apostle* gives of such as are to be set apart to so high and holy an Office. They have a Power to admonish and  
reprimand



reprimand in Case of Misbehaviour in lesser Matters; and for scandalous Offences to degrade and displace the unruly and incorrigible. Such a Power as this is visibly necessary to answer the End of the Society, and consequently the Rulers thereof must have it.

3. Since *Men of vicious Lives, scandalously and notoriously Immoral*, are avow'd Enemies to God, and such as his Soul abhors, and he will judge; it is not consistent with the Honour and Reverence due to God, whose Honour, Reverence and Worship it is the very End and Design of the Society to promote, to entertain any such avow'd and declar'd Enemies of his amongst them, to own them for Brethren or Members of the Society: For this would be in Effect to encourage them in their Impiety, and contribute to their Damnation, by admitting them to the most solemn and sacred Rite of Union and Communion, which none can partake of but to the enhancing of their own Guilt, and aggravating their own Condemnation, but the Honest, Sincere Christian. The Governours of the *Church* therefore have a Right publicly to discard all such by turning them out of their Body; that is, to Excommunicate them. But I would not be misunderstood, as tho' I thought such a Person ought not to be suffered so much as to be present in the *Church* at the Performance of Divine Service; that, I humbly conceive is carrying the Matter too far. The Society shew a sufficient Regard to the Purity of their own Body, and the Honour of God, by disowning him for a Member and a Brother, and debarring him from the solemn Rite of Communion. The admitting

mitting him to be present at Divine Worship, and the Sermons may possibly prove a Means of reclaiming him, and can not in the least tend to the Prejudice of the *Church*; and therefore, I think, he ought not in Charity and Compassion to his Soul to be debarr'd that Liberty, if he has a Mind to use it.

4. For the same Reason that *Persons scandalously Vicious* ought to be turn'd out of the *Church*, ought those likewise to be turn'd out that plead for Vice as a lawful and innocent thing. This is a Case that can rarely happen, but sometimes it has, witness the *Gnosticks* of old, and the *Anabaptists* of *Germany*, and *Antinomians* in these latter Times. This is setting open a Flood-gate to all manner of Debauchery and Wickedness, and such an impudent barefaced defying of Heaven, as is utterly inconsistent with any thing of a serious Pretence to Religion; and can hardly indeed be suppos'd to proceed from any other Cause than that of a distemper'd Head and crasie Brain, for which Reason those Persons are fitter for a *Bedlam* than a *Church*. As to such then, I think, there can be no reasonable Doubt made of it, but the *Governours of the Church* have a Right to turn them out of it, as wholly unqualified to partake in the Benefits of the Lord's Supper. For what would it be else but turning all Religion into a Farce and a Jest, to entertain such Monsters of Impiety or Madness as Members of a Society, design'd solely to promote the Honour and Worship of God with the due Observation of his Laws; since it's plain they must be utterly unqualified for Members of such a Society, who absolutely deny the

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Obligation of those Laws, and are so far from meaning any such thing, as the keeping of them, that they openly and barefac'dly insist upon a Liberty, both for themselves and every Body else to break them.

5. *As to Matters of Faith or meer Belief, the Authority of the Church reaches but a very little way.* The Grand Article of *Jesus's* being the *Messiah* has so near and close a Connexion with, or rather does so visibly include or imply the other necessary Articles of the *Apostles Creed*, that it's impossible to deny, directly to deny the latter, without disbelieving the former too, and thereby apostatizing entirely from the Christian Religion, and turning Infidel. For Instance, whoever should maintain that there is no Life to come, would thereby to all Intents and Purposes deny *Jesus* to be the *Messiah*, for by the *Messiah* is meant a Prince and Deliverer, but if there is no Life to come, 'tis plain he is neither; he can be no Prince, because he neither punishes nor rewards for the Breach of his Laws; no Deliverer, because he delivers from nothing, if he does not deliver from Death; for Mankind are as much subject to the Natural Miseries and Calamities of this frail Life since his coming, as they were before, these he does not deliver from; so that whoever should deny the Life to come, it's visible, whatever he may pretend, can not believe *Jesus Christ* to be the *Messiah*, and therefore is no Subject of his, nor qualified to be a Member of his Church. If therefore any Body pretends directly to deny any of the Necessary Articles of the *Apostles Creed*, he is justly liable to be turn'd out of the Church, as having

visibly

visibly and plainly renounced his *Faith in Jesus Christ*. But this is a Case that can hardly ever happen, all Christians every where agreeing in those Articles, and for the Reason above mention'd, the visible and immediate Connexion between those Articles and the Great and Leading one of *Jesus's* being the *Messiah*, which is so very Evident, that every one at first sight discerns there's no denying one without renouncing the other. But as for other Matters, how much soever Men may be suppos'd to be mistaken, so long as their Mistakes are consistent enough with a hearty sincere Belief of *Jesus* the *Messiah*, and a good Life, they are not to be turn'd out of the *Church* for them. God has promised Salvation to all such as believe *Jesus* to be the *Messiah*, take him for their Lord and King, and obey his Laws, and therefore to turn such out of the *Church* is utterly inconsistent with the Honour and Reverence due to God Almighty, and so consequently with the very End and Design of the Society.

But to make out this Matter a little more fully; I say, as to these Articles and Doctrines of Christianity, no where insisted upon in Scripture as fundamental or necessary to be believ'd in order to Salvation, the Members of the Society are to be left to their Freedom; that is to say, the Rulers of the *Church* can have no Right to impose their Opinions or Interpretations of Scripture under the Pain of *Excommunication*. This is not the way to promote Christian Knowledge, but quite the contrary. For let us suppose our *Church Governours* never so much in the Right, and so consequently those that differ from them never so much in the Wrong, yet such a

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Method of Proceeding must either make Men Hypocrites in an outward Profession of believing what they do not believe to avoid the *Excommunication*, or if they hold out, it will only serve to render them more obstinate in their Errours, by making them deaf to all Arguments and Reasons that can be offered them, by such as they cannot but look upon as their Enemies, because of the base and unfair Usage they must needs think they have from them, since all Mankind must ever think it hard to be ill used for maintaining the Truth. Passion and Resentment which amongst frail Men, will seldom fail to be the Consequence of such rough Methods, discompose the Mind, break its Attention, and thereby render it less fit to consider and weigh the Arguments and Reasons on each side the Question in order to a fair, just and rational Solution of it. For the *Church Rulers* therefore to interpose in any Dispute, or Difference of Opinion that may arise in the *Church* with Reference to *Matters not Fundamental*, that is, not plainly insisted upon in Scripture as necessary to Salvation, by pretending to decide the Contröversy, and impose their own Sense of the Matter upon the Members of the Society under the Pain of *Excommunication*, is so far from being a Means of promoting true Christian Knowledge, though we should suppose them always in the Right, that it is a direct Means of promoting the contrary; that is to say, Errour, with all that Passion, Malice, Revenge, which more or less seldom fail to be the Effects of ill Usage; the promoting of which is utterly inconsistent with the End and Design of a *Church*. But if we consider how liable *Church Rulers* are to be mistaken as well

well as other Men, and how frequently and grossly they have been so in their most solemn Decisions, the Matter will appear still worse; for a great many will always be found weak enough to believe all they say, Hand over Head, without any manner of Consideration, upon the bare Foot of their imaginary suppos'd Authority; and others will be found wicked enough to pretend so, and thus will *Errour* and *Hypocrisy* be promoted with a Vengeance. Nor is this bare Imagination but Matter of Fact, the Thing is actually come to pass every where almost. All the *horrid, blasphemous, senseless Doctrines of the pretended Church of Rome* owe their Rise and Support entirely to this Conduct in the Rulers and Managers of that *Cabal*, together with the *Damnable Doctrine of Persecution* practis'd amongst them to the highest Perfection. Truth, it's plain, can receive no Advantage from such a Method of proceeding, soft Usage and hard Arguments are the only proper Means of making that prevail in the World. The Opinion of the *Church* or *Church-Governers* rather is no Reasonable Ground of Assent, nor ought any one to be determined by it as such; the Authority of Man will offer lead to Errour than Truth, and therefore cannot be safely followed or depended on. If the Reasons and Arguments they alledge for their Opinions appear Satisfactory, their Doctrine will be received without being impos'd; but if they appear otherwise, it neither can nor ought to be received: and consequently there neither is nor can be any Reason for imposing, since that cannot serve the Ends of *Truth*, but will only tend, as we have above taken Notice, to the promoting of *Errour* and *Hypocrisy*.

Thus



Thus far then, I humbly conceive, *Church Authority* extends and no farther, since no more Power can be necessary to the End and Design of a *Church*, than that of determining all the Circumstances of Worship that either *Necessity* or *Decency* require, appointing proper Pastors, the displacing such as behave themselves in a manner unworthy of their Character, and the turning those out of the *Church* that are either scandalously Vicious, or deny the Fundamental Doctrines of Christianity; this I say is, I humbly conceive, all the Authority that *Church Governours* as such can have. Our next Enquiry now shall be what kind of Authority this is, with Reference to the setting up or appointing a *Form of Worship*.

1. It is an Authority that obliges all Christians within the Verge of that Society to Consideration, and if they find nothing required or insisted on in order to Communion, but what they may with a good Conscience conform to; it further obliges them to a Compliance, or else People would lie under no Obligation of meeting together for the Worship of God at all, which is contrary to Scripture and the common Sense of Mankind: or at least, a causeless Separation from a *True Church of Christ* would be an Innocent Harmless thing, equally contrary to Scripture and the common Sentiments of all Christians. Where therefore a *Church* is once gathered in any Place, that is a Society, the Laws and Rules whereof are intended solely to promote the true Worship of God, Piety and Virtue; all People in that Place are obliged to consider them fairly and impartially, and such as upon Consideration are satisfied with them, are under

an Obligation in Point of Conscience to obey them. But

2. *Ecclesiastical Authority* is not, in strict and proper Speaking, a *Legislative Authority*; for this is not only a Right to prescribe Rules, but to punish for Disobedience, which *Church Governours* have not, nor is it consistent with the Nature of the Society they should. All that God requires of any Man is to judge impartially and act accordingly, but whether he does or no, he alone as he is the Searcher of Hearts can know, and therefore he alone has a Right to judge and punish in Cases of this Nature, it is an impious invading the Throne of the most High for Man to pretend to it. If any one declares he is not in his Conscience satisfied with the Terms of Communion insisted upon in any *Church*, who dare pretend to say the contrary with Assurance but God, who knows the Heart. He alone can tell whether the Man has done his Duty in Considering, and therefore is alone qualified to judge him in a Case of this Nature, and to him as his only Master here he must stand or fall. He will be sure to judge and punish the Disorderly, and such as rashly and causelessly make Divisions in the *Church*, whether Man do or no. And howsoever such as act upon a true Principle of *Conscience* may be punished by Man, under the Pretence of being causeless Disturbers of the *Church's* Peace, they will certainly be acquitted and rewarded at the Great Day: So that it's as plain as any thing in the World can be, that the Punishments of another Life are in the Hands of God alone, those belong not to the Governours of any *Church* whatever; and as for those of this Life, they are in the Hands of the *Civil Magistrate*.

But



But you'll say perhaps, where the Civil Magistrate is supreme Governour in Matters Ecclesiastical, which is the Case here in *England*, may not he enforce the Observation of his own Ecclesiastical Laws by Civil Penalties; I answer, no, I humbly conceive he cannot. *Ecclesiastical Authority* is the very same, wherever lodg'd, whether in the Hands of a Prince or a Subject. It is an Authority to prescribe and perswade, but not to force or compel; for that would be Persecution, which we have above shewn to be inconsistent with the sole End and Design of a *Church*, and destructive of it's very Being; besides how ridiculous is it to pretend to force People to a Compliance with Ecclesiastical Laws; when a Compliance with them cannot in the least avail to the Benefit of their Souls, or answer the End propos'd in the Laws themselves the True Worship of God, any farther than it is the Effect of a free unconstrain'd and Reasonable Choice. Nay farther, it is in the Nature of Things utterly and absolutely impossible to force any Man to join in a Worship he does not approve of, all the Whipping, Fining, Hanging, Burning in the World will never do it; you may bring him to *Church* it's true, make him signify outwardly, by Standing, Kneeling, Bowing, as the *Church* directs, an Approbation of what his Soul inwardly abhors; but this is only a Piece of dismal Hypocritical Farce, not joyning in the Worship, for in order to that the Heart and Affections must go along with the outward Actions or Gestures, which in this Case it is as impossible they should, as for a Man to approve and disapprove of the same thing at the same Time: so that all Punishing in Matters of mere  
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Religion, or the enforcing of Ecclesiastical Laws by Civil Sanctions, is so far from being of any Use to the *Church*, that it is point-blank contrary to the Nature and Design of it, tends directly to the promoting of Diffimulation and Hypocrisy, and thereby to the Damnation of Souls and nothing else. Those that desire further Satisfaction upon this Head may consult Mr. *Lock's Admirable Letters of Toleration*, where they will find it made out by that Strength of Reason peculiar to that *Great and Wonderful Man*, how useless dangerous and pernicious a Thing Force is in Matters of meer Religion.

Some perhaps will think I forget my own Doctrine, in denying *Church Governours* have a Right to punish, since I my self allow of *Excommunication*. I answer, *Excommunication* being nothing but a publick Disowning a Person for a Member of the *Church*, and debarring him from the Communion of the Lord's Supper, which he has no Right to is properly no Punishment, it affects not his Condition in this Life or that to come. God will be sure to punish a Person lyable to *Excommunication*, whether he is excommunicated or no. The Magistrate likewise has a Right to punish for Immorality committed against the Civil Laws of the Common-wealth, whether a Man be in the *Church* or out of it. It's plain therefore those Punishments do not in the least depend upon *Excommunication* as their Cause, since the one certainly will, and the other may and ought to be inflicted equally, whether a Man be excommunicated or no.

Thus I have endeavour'd to clear up the Truth in this Matter, a Matter of the highest Importance to Mankind; since Men's Mistakes therein  
either



either Real or Pretended have been the Source of more Mischief in the World, than any one thing besides, as every one must grant that does but reflect upon the dismal Condition of all *Europe* before the Times of the *Reformation*, and the greatest Part of it at this Day. Other Mistakes have ruined their Thousands, but these their Ten Thousands ten thousand times told. Millions and Millions have been sacrificed to *this Idol of Ecclesiastical Authority*. It behoves all Men of clear Heads and honest Hearts to oppose with one Consent the Designs of all such amongst us, as appear but too much inclin'd to play the old Game over again, whose Fingers itch to be handling the Rod, to lord and domineer it over God's Heritage, to gratify their own *insatiable Avarice, Pride and Ambition*, at the Expence of the Lives and Fortunes of the rest of Mankind. For what Matters would come to, and in a little Time, if those Persons were but let alone is visible enough; Every one will easily perceive I mean a certain Set of Men, that should of all others be wiser, Enemies to the Best and Wisest Prince that ever *Great-Britain* saw. May God long preserve so precious and inestimable a Life for the Protection of Truth, and the Maintainers of it against those that are equally Enemies to it and him; and may his Posterity to all succeeding Generations be inspired with the same generous and noble Sentiments, that fill the Breast of his Royal Majesty in Favour of the Civil and Ecclesiastical Rights of Mankind.

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